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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001182

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PTER MARR MOPS KPKO UNSC LE IS

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE RESPONSE: ENFORCING THE WEAPONS-FREE ZONE
IN SOUTH LEBANON

REF: A. SECSTATE 109989

- 1B. BEIRUT 1169
- 1C. BEIRUT 1022
- 1D. BEIRUT 1153

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In response to Ref A demarche detailing U.S. concerns on GOL enforcement of a weapons-free zone in south Lebanon, Caretaker Minister of Defense Elias Murr, Advisor to President Sleiman Naji Abi Assi, and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Jean Kahwagi acknowledged the negative consequences of continued violations of UNSCR 1701 in separate meetings October 26 and 27. Each also cited deficiencies in LAF capabilities to undertake effective preventative measures. Nonetheless, all three assured Ambassador that the U.S. message was clear. Kahwagi also reported that the LAF had increased the tempo of ground patrols, called Counter Rocket Launch Operations, south of the Litani River in the wake of the September 11 rocket launch. On October 28, a rocket was again launched from south Lebanon into Israel (septel). Caretaker Prime Minister Siniora quickly issued a statement condemning the incident as a violation of UNSCR 1701. Recommendations on specific steps the GOL should undertake to improve enforcement of a weapons-free zone in south Lebanon are included para 11. End Summary.

CARETAKER DEFENSE MINISTER MURR

12. (C) The Ambassador noted USG recognition of the LAF's continued cooperation with UNIFIL to investigate recent security incidents in south Lebanon to GOL and LAF interlocutors when delivering Ref A demarche points, but also underscored the growing U.S. perception that the GOL tolerates such incidents and was not taking proactive measures to prevent future incidents from occurring. Caretaker Defense Minister Elias Murr asserted to the Ambassador on October 26 that, in cooperation with PM-designate Hariri and LAF Commander Kahwagi, he intended to define a policy to implement UNSCR 1701 fully, focusing on prevention through the increased use of joint patrols with UNIFIL in the south. He said that Saudi Arabia had already promised to provide financial assistance to the GOL which could be used to enhance the LAF budget. With the Saudi cash infusion, the GOL could purchase two used helicopters with the appropriate monitoring equipment for use in the south, he continued. This would be the most effective tool to prevent additional violations of 1701, Murr posited, because "when someone thinks someone is constantly monitoring the area, then he will stop." The Ambassador pointed out that the LAF

could act now to increase its patrols and use U.S.-provided equipment to monitor the area in order to prevent further violations and to enforce a weapons-free zone.

¶13. (C) Murr asserted that the cabinet ministers to be named by the majority coalition would insist that the ministerial statement issued at the time of government formation contain stronger language supporting the full implementation of UNSCR ¶1701. He pointed out that recent violations of UNSCR 1701 occurred during the time of government transition and asserted that a stronger ministerial statement would give political cover for stepped-up enforcement. The Ambassador noted that PM-designate Hariri had been clear with visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Colin Kahl on October 22 that a "strong army undermines Hizballah" (ref B).

¶14. (C) In responding to U.S. concerns regarding apparent LAF unwillingness to confront violations of UNSCR 1701, Murr argued that the GOL and the LAF suffer from three weak points hobbling an effective prevention regime. First, he said, the continued lack of a Lebanese government created a governance and security vacuum in which even he has little authority to make decisions. Second, he complained, the LAF does not have enough monitoring equipment -- including helicopters outfitted with cameras and night-vision capability -- to conduct effective 24-hour patrols of the area covered under UNSCR 1701. Third, he continued, the LAF cannot count on the cooperation of southern residents to "tip off" the LAF or UNIFIL if they are aware weapons are being transported in the area. Murr claimed that "all of the houses in the south have bunkers underneath" and rhetorically questioned why a Shia resident would cooperate with Sunni, Christian, or foreign security personnel assigned to the south.

¶15. (C) Murr declared that there was "no doubt" about how "dangerous" Hizballah is. However, he claimed that Hizballah had "zero influence" within the LAF. He explained that out of approximately 14,000 soldiers, 50% are Sunni, 27% are Christian and the remaining 23% are Shia. Among the Shia cadre, 12% are assigned in the south, he said. Many of the Shia soldiers are Amal supporters, some are against Hizballah, and some are neutral, Murr added, which leaves less than "a few hundred" who might be sympathetic to Hizballah.

LAF COMMANDER KAHWAGI
ON COUNTER-ROCKET LAUNCH OPERATIONS

¶16. (C) In raising demarche points with LAF Commander Kahwagi the following day, the Ambassador emphasized that it was not simply a matter of investigating security events in the south after they happened, but of taking steps to prevent them. Kahwagi responded that the LAF had already increased the tempo of ground patrols, called Counter Rocket Launch Operations (CRLO), in the wake of the September 11 rocket launch (ref C). In October alone, the LAF carried out 308 CRLOs and manned 200 additional checkpoints, Kahwagi said, a high tempo considering the LAF's limited resources in the south. Kahwagi explained that although he needed more resources in the south, he could not shift them from his "primary mission" of maintaining internal order by controlling the "explosive" confessional mix in Beirut, maintaining watch over the Palestinian camps, and keeping the peace in the Bekaa.

¶17. (C) Kahwagi added that Hizballah was not only "a military problem," but also a political one when "politicians remain silent on the matter." He reiterated that diminishing Hizballah's stronghold in Lebanon is not only an internal issue but also a regional one, requiring international support and consensus. Kahwagi emphasized that the Israeli "failure" to tame the south during the 2006 war revealed Hizballah's integration into the fabric of village life in the area south of the Litani. "Each village had what it needed because weapons were held within each home," he declared. "Hizballah is the people, and families defended

their villages," he added, admitting that this reality hampers attempts to disarm Hizballah. He emphasized Lebanese commitment to implementing UNSCR 1701.

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ABI ASSI
POINTS THE FINGER AT PALESTINIAN CAMPS

¶8. (C) On October 26, when the Ambassador raised Hizballah's blatant disregard for a weapons-free zone in the south, including the storage of weapons in heavily populated areas, Presidential Advisor Abi Assi reiterated Lebanon's commitment to implementing UNSCR 1701 and underscored the need to maintain stability in the south. He professed that "the resistance has a different philosophy and political methodology" and averred that neither the U.S. nor Lebanon could implement UNSCR 1701 through violence or war.

¶9. (C) Abi Assi emphasized that the results of the investigations of recent incidents would provide important indicators as to the source of the violations, which he expected would show that "the Palestinian camps" were at the root of the problems. Furthermore, he analyzed, the existence of weapons in the south includes a mix of arms present there before the start of the 2006 war as well as new arms introduced to the area since the war. The Ambassador urged that the GOL and the LAF not only investigate events after they occur but also take steps to prevent them. A continuation of the current situation, she said, risks another conflict with Israel, undermines UNIFIL, impedes 1701 implementation, and damages LAF and GOL credibility. Abi Assi countered that the U.S. should also consider the latest UN Special Coordinator on Lebanon (UNSCOL) 1701 report, which positively appraised the GOL's efforts to work with UNIFIL to implement the resolution and maintain stability in the south.

SINIORA ON UNSCR 1701,
LATEST ROCKET LAUNCH INTO ISRAEL

¶10. (C) On the evening of October 27, a 107 mm Grad Katyusha rocket was launched from south Lebanon into Israel) septel. Caretaker Prime Minister Fouad Siniora released a statement condemning the rocket launch as well as the Israeli retaliatory fire. Siniora's statement noted that the Lebanese government would take the measures necessary to prevent recurrence "as (the rocket launch) is considered to be a violation of UNSCR 1701 and an assault on the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and its national interests." The increasing frequency of security incidents in southern Lebanon is "alarming," Nader Hariri, adviser to PM-designate Saad Hariri, told polchief on October 28. He reported that the PM-designate would meet with Hizballah representatives the same night and convey his concerns to them.

ADDITIONAL STEPS

¶11. (C) There are a number of ways in which the LAF could improve enforcement of the weapons-free zone in the south. The LAF should provide its brigades in the south the resources needed to increase the tempo of activities with regard to maintaining checkpoints, performing routine patrols in coordination with UNIFIL, continuing foot patrols and CRLO patrols, and carrying out Blue Line patrols. We should encourage the LAF to use the Cessna Caravan aircraft and Raven UAV to perform aerial surveillance of the area. The LAF can take many additional steps to reallocate human and material resources to the south and keep the pressure on armed militias in the region, such as constructing new bases in the south, restructuring units to make them lighter, deploying more U.S.-provided equipment to the area, and expanding civil-military cooperation activities.